



A Thematic Analysis of N.G. Sibiyi's Selected Essays in *Amalangabi*

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to critically examine themes that are found in N.G. Sibiyi's selected essays in *Amalangabi* (1993). It was discovered that Sibiyi highlights some thought-provoking issues in his essays, but to the best of the researcher's knowledge, nothing or less has been done so far about Sibiyi's work on the essay genre.

It is this scholarly gap that this study is attempting to fill. The study is done through the post-colonial approach since the selected themes touch on social aspects. The themes 'Discrimination against people with stutters', 'Stereotypes against people with stutters', and 'Patience produces good results' are examined from the essays 'Amalimi' and 'Ukulinda'.

Introduction

This study discusses some of the themes found in Sibiya's essays in *Amalangabi* (1993). There are three themes to be discussed and they are categorised under the phrase 'social aspects' because of their nature. N.G. Sibiya is one of the prominent authors who has contributed greatly to the literature of isiZulu. Not only is he an essayist, but he is also a short story and novel author. His book, *Amalangabi*, is a volume that consists of both short stories and essays. Attention is only paid to essays in this study.

Cuddon (2013: 251) defines an essay as a prose composition which discusses, informally or formally, a topic or subject matter. Abrams and Harpham (2009: 103), on the other hand, point out that an essay is a piece of literature that seeks to discuss a subject matter, express a point of view, and persuade the audience to accept a claim on the proposed subject matter. Murfin and Ray (2003: 143) share the same sentiment by similarly defining an essay as a non-fiction composition that is brief as compared to genres such as short stories and novels. It aims to explore a single theme or topic. The three definitions above emphasise that an essay is a prose composition which discusses a specific subject. In line with this view, an essay can be succinctly defined as one of the genres in prose where the essayist chooses a subject, makes a claim, and then outlines reasons in support of that claim. He/she can write about any topic and there is no specific length prescription.

Essayists, or authors in general, write literary works because there is a message they intend to communicate or convey. This is their way of engaging with the audience and this can be determined by analysing the themes that constitute their literary work. Sibiya's essays are thus examined to determine the themes that are identified. The term 'theme' will be defined first and, since the identified themes are treated as social aspects, it is seen as a necessity for the phrase 'social aspect' to be defined as well. The definition of this term is therefore provided after the definition of theme. This is then followed by a detailed discussion on the selected themes, and this is after literature review and methodology. Since essays are the primary source, this suggests that the study adopts textual analysis as a qualitative research method. The study is done through the lenses of the post-colonial approach as a theoretical framework.

The aim of this paper is to critically explore the themes found in N.G. Sibiya's selected essays in the volume highlighted above since, to the best of the researcher's knowledge, nothing much has been done exploring this aspect of Sibiya's works. Dlamini (2019), on whose Honours' research essay this study is based, is probably the only scholar to touch on themes identified in Sibiya's essays.

Literature review

There are very few research studies done on the genre of essays in Zulu as compared to novels and short stories. Zulu's M.A. dissertation (1991) 'The Structure and Content of Zulu Essays with Special Reference to Those of C.S. Ntuli' and Zukula's Honours research essay (2017) 'Ikhono Lika-D.B.K. Mhlongo Lokusebenzisa Izifengqo Kuma Eseyi esiZulu' ('D.B.K. Mhlongo's Skill to Use Figures of Speech in Zulu Essays') are the predominant studies the researcher could find in this genre. Zulu analyses the structure, contents, and style in C.S. Ntuli's essays. Zukula, on the other hand, scrutinises figures of speech in D.B.K. Mhlongo's essays. These include simile, metaphor, personification, symbolism, euphemism, hyperbole, and rhetorical questions.

The fact that there are only a few Zulu research studies in the genre of essays does not, however, mean that there are no studies done in this field in other African languages. The following M.A. dissertations were done on essays in past years:

- 'An Analysis of the Essays of P. Lesenyane' by L.F. Khumalo (1997) in Setswana.
- 'The Essay in Southern Sotho' by P.R.S. Maphike (1978).
- 'Essay in Xhosa' by W.M. Kwetana (1987).
- 'A Critical Analysis of A.M. Tlooke's Essays: Bohwabogolo' by Mashabela (n.d) in Northern Sotho.
- 'The Form, Content and Style in P. Leyane's Lethaku le Legologolo' by Monyai (1997) in Setswana.

All these studies will be useful in this work as they will provide guidance for the researcher. The discovery that there is no study, to the best of the researcher's

knowledge, that has been done on *Amalangabi* since publication in 1993, has prompted the researcher to undertake this study.

Theoretical framework

The importance of a theory in underpinning every research study based on literature cannot be denied. No one can do research in literature without using a theory (Sholomit in Zukula, 2017: 9). A theory plays an important role in enhancing the understanding of the fundamental elements that shape any written literary piece. In support of this, Castle (2007: 3) says:

‘A natural scientist will use theory in ways that will yield precise, verifiable, repeated results; a literary scholar will use it in order to make informed and plausible interpretations that may not be precise, verifiable, or repeatable.’

Castle’s view indicates that the use of theories helps scholars to interpret and get insightful meaning from literature. Abed, in Sithole (2017: 7), adds to this view by saying that theories are intended to explicate, predict, and enhance the understanding of phenomena. The insights raised by Castle and Abed above highlight the importance of theories in interpreting and getting meaning from literature. The post-colonial approach is the utilised theory that will underpin the interpretation and extraction of meaning in N.G. Sibiyi’s essays. Below is the explanation of this theory and its relevance to the study.

A basic idea in understanding the concept of post-colonial theory is given by Castle (2013: 242) who says:

‘Post-colonial studies is an interdisciplinary domain in which we can discern two very broad trends: on the one hand, we see a concentration on imperialism and colonialism, while on the other hand we see primary accounts of post-colonial literature, culture, society, and politics.’

Castle (*op cit.*) further states:

‘There is a historical progress at work here, with foundational works in the field focusing on imperialism and colonialism locations and later work, much of it emoting from post-colonial states, laying stress on questions of nationalism,

local literatures and language, religion and culture and social conditions.’

The view presented by Castle above indicates how post-colonial theory has been perceived and approached since its birth. Its initial work focused on imperialism and colonialism. There has, however, been a shift that saw the inclusion of studying the present social aspects which may not have a lot to do with colonialism or imperialism in post-colonial societies. Murfin and Ray (2003: 356) maintain a similar view in support of this idea by saying:

‘The term post-colonial theory is sometimes also extended to refer to situations that share material characteristics with post-colonial conditions but that do not actually involve a former colony.’

The insights provided by the scholars above highlight that post-colonial theory is an approach that is also concerned about social circumstances in modern societies. The themes to be discussed in this study are treated as social aspects as they are about people and their relation to society. As the post-colonial approach observes social circumstances, in general, it is seen as suitable and relevant for this study. This approach is perceived to be suitable in guiding the analysis data in this discourse because it seeks to critically review and account on societal/social issues. In this instance, the selected essays are the subject of analysis to uncover such issues.

Methodology

The primary source in this study is Sibiyi’s *Amalangabi* (1993), a volume that contains the essays to be studied.



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This means that other data collection methods such as interviews, surveys, and so on are not utilised. Studying Sibiya's essays implies that the study is done qualitatively, with textual analysis as a qualitative research technique. Malterud (2001: 483) describes the qualitative method as involving 'the systematic collection, organisation, and interpretation of textual material derived from talk or observation.' Instead of talks or observations, information is collected, organised, and interpreted solely from *Amalangabi* in this study.

The concept of theme

According to De Silva (1991: 500), theme is the subject/topic of a narrative work of literature, or the main idea articulated by the author. This definition points out two different views. Firstly, it is a subject/topic of a work and secondly, it is the main idea expressed by the author. In view of these definitions, there are some scholars who agree with De Silva's second definition and not the first one. For example, Moloele (2001: 51) cites Cuddon who argues that theme is not a subject of the work, but it is rather the central idea. Cassill (1975: 169) supports this by stating that theme is not to be misinterpreted as a subject matter, it is the meaning portrayed by the story. Diamond (1993: 6) also moves along these lines by stating: 'Theme is that leading idea or concept which a text deals with.'

Diamond (1993: 7) further states:

'A topic is general while "theme" is specific. Theme refers to the insight the dramatist is trying to communicate to the readers by means of a certain topic, plot, and characters.'

While Diamond defines theme with regard to 'the dramatist,' his definition applies to other literary forms as well. The definitions given above show that theme is not to be confused with the general subject or topic of a literary work. In contrast to the subject matter, theme is the specific main idea that is communicated through the subject/topic of a certain piece of writing. It is the key idea that underpins the author's written work. Theme should also not be confused with the moral of the story. The moral is a lesson to be learned in the story (Cuddon, 2013: 445) and theme is the main idea.

The discussed themes in this paper are regarded as social aspects because of their social nature. The

Macmillan English Dictionary (2002: 1358) defines the term 'social' as something that involves society and people's lives. The term is derived from the noun 'society'. To understand better what the adjective means, it is important to observe the original word which is the noun 'society'. Thus, the noun is to explain the adjective better. Ronney, in Tshomela (2006: 4), defines society as:

'The sum total relationships among groups of humans or animals...a structured community of people bound together by similar traditions, institutions, or nationality.'

Another definition is given by Giddens, in Tshomela (2006: 4), who perceives society as: 'The system of interrelationships which connects together the individuals who share a common culture.' The views given by the scholars above express that society is made up of a group of people who share a similar way of living and doing things.

By saying the themes to be discussed are treated as social aspects, the researcher implies that they have something to do with people and the society they live in. These are factors that directly or indirectly impact people's day-to-day lives.

Discussion of themes in N.G. Sibiya's essays

This section is a discussion of themes found in N.G. Sibiya's essays. These themes are: 'Discrimination against people with stutters', 'Stereotypes against people with stutters', and 'Patience produces good results', as indicated earlier.

Discrimination against people with stutters

This is a sensitive theme found in Sibiya's essays, mainly because of the historical imbalances in South Africa and attempts to redress them over the years. The *Macmillan English Dictionary* (2002: 393) defines discrimination as an unjust treatment that a certain group of people may suffer because of their religion, race, gender, or any other personal features.

In the essay 'Amalimi' the unnoticed discrimination that people with stutters experience in their lives is highlighted. Discrimination is a social aspect as it involves people and their relation in community.

The essay expresses that people with stutters come across challenges in different areas of their lives. They receive unjust and unfair treatment because of their condition. The first example where such individuals experience discrimination is in workplaces. It is indicated that there are job opportunities people with stutters struggle to or do not receive. The words from the essay illuminate this:

'Awubheke nje imisebenzi enjengokuba ngumsakazi. Kangikaze ngizwe noyedwa umsakazi onamalimi. Kuwubandlululo olukhulu lokhu.' (1993: 3)

(Just look at jobs like broadcasting. I have never heard even one stuttering broadcaster. This is serious marginalisation.)

In the above words, the author is expressing his concern that stuttering people are not given opportunities to be broadcasters. He condemns this and believes it is an act of discrimination. The definition of discrimination given above reveals the truth behind the words expressed by the author. It becomes discrimination when people with stutters are not fairly treated because of their personal feature of stuttering. The essay highlights the reality faced by people with stutters; they are not given enough access to broadcasting vacancies.

It is also indicated from the essay that individuals with stutters also face challenges even in workplaces. The author is again showing his concern about these people's experiences in the following words:

'Nasemisebenzini yiso leso. Uma kukhethwa isigungu esizodlulisela izikhulo kwabakhulu kwenziwa isiqinisekiso esikhulu sokuthi akukhethwa umuntu onamalimi.' (1993: 4–5)

(It is the same situation in the workplace. When a committee to present employees' grievances to the owners is selected, it is highly ensured that a stuttering person is not elected.)

The words above explain that even in workplaces, stuttering people do not receive equal opportunities to do certain tasks. According to the definition of discrimination given above, this is also an act of discrimination. People with stutters are not given fair

treatment and access to equal opportunities.

It is further shown that learners/students with stutters experience discrimination even at school. This is shown in the following passage:

'Ezikoleni bayabandlululwa. Kabakhethwa uma kufuneka abazodlala emidlalweni yeshashalazi. Kabaqokwa uma kunezinkulumo-mpikiswano ezihlelwe ukusiza wonke umuntu osuke ewumfundi.' (1993: 4).

(In schools they are marginalised. They are not selected when there is a need for individuals to take part in theatre plays. They are not appointed when there are debates that are intended to help every learner/student.)

This is another example raised in support of the fact that people with stutters experience discrimination. The word *'bayabandlululwa'* from the passage means 'they are being marginalised' and it has been deliberately used to express disapproval of the marginalisation people with stutters suffer against in schools. The act of not selecting learners with stutters to take part in theatre plays and debates is considered to be an act of discrimination.

The points from the essay are given to support the argument that people with stutters experience discrimination. When looking at the definition of discrimination, the argument is indeed valid. If there is

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a group of people not receiving equal treatment and opportunities because of personal features that they cannot change on any given day, this is discrimination. In this case, people with stutters are treated unequally because of their condition.

In summary, it was explained earlier that theme is the meaning and main idea the author intends to communicate. The subject is on stutters in general but one of the themes that can be extracted is discrimination. This was discovered after reading the essay. The truth of this is made relevant by the words of Boynton and Mack (1992: 276) who state: 'The theme cannot be understood in isolation from the story which embodies it.'

Discrimination is what the essay seeks to manifest. This section of the essay is intended to show that people with stutters experience discrimination in different areas of their lives. This is one of the social issues that calls for society's attention. An awareness that people with stutters are being discriminated against is marked by this theme in the essay. This alludes to what Cassill (1975: 172) says about theme in general:

'The theme is what is left, like resonance in the reader's mind after he has recovered from the emotions and sympathies he felt while reading and even after he has forgotten the shape of the plot and the allusion contributed by characters.'

Stereotypes against people with stutters

Stereotyping is another theme that is highlighted in the essay 'Amalimi'. The *Macmillan English Dictionary* (2002: 1406) defines the term 'stereotype' as a fixed idea that exists in people's minds about a particular person or thing which in most cases is not true in reality.

The essay shows the unrealistic ideas that exist in people's minds about people with stutters. The first unrealistic idea indicated in the essay is the fact that most people perceive stuttering people as disabled. It is explained in the essay that most people share the same sentiment that there is something wrong with stuttering people. The author's personal concern is revealed in these words:

'Lesi sicefe semizamo efile yabantu abangenawo amalimi sisuka ekutheni abantu abangenawo amalimi babheke abantu abanamalimi njengabantu abakhubazekile. Kubona kusengathi kuningi okungahambi kahlehle kubantu abanamalimi-yikho nje bedinga ukusizwa nokuqedelwa izinkulumo zabo.' (1993: 3)

(This nuisance of attempts by people who do not have stutters originates from the idea that they look at people with stutters as disabled. To them it seems as if there is a lot that is not going well with stuttering people—that is why they need to be helped to complete their utterance.)

The above words reveal one of the stereotypes people hold; they perceive individuals with stutters as disabled and needing help to communicate. The words are the author's attempt to address this stereotyping. They indirectly express the idea that people with stutters are not disabled. There is nothing wrong with them and they need no assistance to complete their sentences. By saying '*Lesi sicefe semizamo efile*' (This nuisance of dead attempts—), the author is expressing his disapproval to people's actions of trying to help stuttering people with practical tasks such as completing their own sentences.

The essay further exposes another example of stereotyping. The idea that people with stutters cannot complete some practical tasks well, such as teaching, is challenged. The words of the author explain this:

'Abantu abengenawo amalimi kababethemi abantu abanamalimi. Bababukela phansi. Kabakholwa ngukuthi ikhona into esile engenziwa ngumuntu onamalimi, ayenze kahle yenzisiseke. Yikho uma ngixoxa indaba yokuthi ngifuna ukuba nguthisha ngomuso kuye kube nokumangala kwabangingi: "uyofundisa kanjani unamalimi?"' (1993: 3)

(People who do not have stutters do not trust stuttering people. They underestimate them. They do not believe that there is something decent a person with stutters can do well. That is why when I share that I want to become a teacher in the future, amazement arises from a lot of people:

“How are you going to teach with stutters?”)

In the words above, the author indicates that people with stutters are not trusted. They are generally underestimated. This is a result of the belief that they are unable to do decent tasks such as teaching because of their stuttering condition. The author's perspective is revealed in these words as the subject morpheme 'ngi'- (I) indicates the first person singular. The belief that people with stutters are unable to do certain tasks is presented as an act of stereotyping by the author. He is condemning such beliefs to be unrealistic fixed ideas in people's minds. These beliefs amaze him. He is struggling to understand why people have such unrealistic ideas about stuttering people.

The essay also shows another act of stereotyping that is frequently revealed through people's questions. One example of such questions is: 'Kawakubambi yini amalimi uma ucula' (1993: 5) ('Do you not stutter when you sing?'). This question shows people's fixed idea that people with stutters are unable to sing. It is regarded to be an act of stereotyping in the essay. It is in fact regarded as an insult. This is evident in these words expressed by the author:

'Uyacasula lo mbuzo. Uyasinukubeza isithunzi somuntu. Kusuke kufanele ahlawuliswe umuntu osuke ebuza lo mbuzo oyinhlamba.' (1993: 5)

(This question is annoying. It degrades a person's image. A person asking this insulting question should be fined.)

A careful analysis of these words shows that this question is stereotypical and as a result, is challenged to be false. The words 'uyacasula' (it is annoying), 'uyanukubeza' (it degrades), and 'oyinhlamba' (which is an insult) show strong emotions that are evoked as a result of this question. The response to the stereotype revealed through the question above is negative. The negative response indicates disapproval to this stereotype.

In summary, stereotyping is one of the themes/main ideas that can be extracted in the essay 'Amalimi'. The theme can be regarded as falling under social aspects. Stereotypes are perpetrated by people and affect people one way or another. People with stutters

are part of the society and these stereotypes affect them to some extent. An issue that is sensitive and demands attention is stressed through the prose text once again.

Patience produces good results

This is one of the themes in the essay 'Ukulinda'. The essay describes how people's day-to-day lives revolve around waiting. Waiting is perceived to be a challenge to people. Nevertheless, it is considered to have its own values and merits. It is argued in the essay that waiting is significant as it builds people.

There are points given from the essay to explain the merits of waiting irrespective of the fact that it is often a difficult art to master. The first point shows the role waiting plays in helping people avoid car accidents. This is shown in the following words:

'Kuliqiniso elingaphikiswa ukuthi kuyinkinga eyisicefe esiwumthwalo omkhulu ukulinda. Izingozi eziningi zidalwa yikho kanye ukwehluleka kwabantu ukubekezela isicefe sokuthi kufanelwe kulindwe. Emadolobheni kufanele ulinde kuze kuvele ilambu eliluhlaza kuqala. Kuvele isiphihli sengozi uma ngeshwa elithile kukhona ongalindanga, wawela lingakakhanyi ilambu okuyilona elimgunyaza ukuthi awele.' (1993: 23)

(It is an undeniable truth that waiting is a huge annoying problem. A lot of accidents are a result of people's failure to be patient. In towns you have to wait for the green light to show. A terrible accident appears when unfortunately, someone fails to wait, and rushes before the light that grants him access emits.)

The passage explains that a lot of accidents in towns are a result of the failure to be patient. Lack of patience is considered to be one of the different causes of accidents. One of the important roles waiting plays is indicated as assisting in avoiding car accidents.

It is also shown in the essay that the ability to wait is not only helpful for car drivers in town, but it is helpful in rural areas as well. The following words from the passage explain this:

'Emakhaya kufanele ube nesineke, ulinde uma uhamba ngemoto. Kunemihlambi yezinkomo othuka udibana nayo emgwaqeni. Kufanele uyimise imoto, ulinde ize yeqe, iwele umgwaqo le mihlambi, bese uyadlula ke. Uma kade lina kufanele ulinde kuze kuhwamuke umgwaqo kuqala, kunciphe udaka. Uma wehluleka wukulinda usuke uzifaka engozini yokuthi imoto yakho ibhajwe odakeni kokunye igingqike.' (1993: 24)

(In the rural areas you need to be patient when you are driving a car. You come across cattle on the road. You have to stop the car and wait for the cattle to pass to the other side and then you pass. If it was raining you have to wait for the road to dry up and for the mud to reduce. If you fail to wait, you are putting yourself in a danger of being trapped in the mud or for your car to tumble).

Patience is seen as a necessity for those who are driving in rural areas as well. It is to be used to avoid car and animal accidents. Waiting is considered to be helpful to drivers in an attempt to avoid accidents that can be a result of heavy rains. The important role waiting plays in avoiding accidents is shown even through the above example. Car accidents are a general concern for the world and waiting is shown to be one of the solutions. The idea that waiting is a challenge but tends to produce good results is shown through the above example as well.

In supporting the view that waiting has merits, an interesting point is provided in the essay. The essay explains that many people meet and develop relationships while they are waiting for trains, to consult doctors, or in the banks. The following passage expresses this:

'Imishado eminingi phela esiye simenywe kuyo imiphumela yokuhlangana ngenkathi kusamiwe, kulindiwe. Bangingi ababonana belinde isitimela, bagcina bexoxa bezwana. Bangingi ababonana kwadokotela nasemabhange belinde ukuthi kuvulwe. Ngokuxoxisana ngenkathi kusalindiwe bagcina bazene, bethandene.' (1993: 24)

(A lot of weddings we are sometimes invited to are a result of waiting. There are a lot of people

who met while they were waiting for a train, ended up talking and relating. There are a lot who met in surgeries and banks while waiting for the opening time. By talking while waiting, they end up knowing and loving each other.)

The passage above contains an important fact that is presented humorously. Many people met during the time of waiting. One can argue that if these individuals lacked patience and failed to wait for trains, in banks, or in surgeries, they probably would not have met the people they are married to. The waiting process resulted in them getting married. It was probably difficult to wait but they got something out of it. This is another example that shows the value and merit of waiting. The aim of this example is to emphasise the fact that waiting produces good results in general.

The points given from the essay stress that patience produces good results even though it is often a challenge to practice for most people. The ability to wait is one of the important qualities in any person's life. It produces good results, some of which are shown through the examples given from the essay. There are general sayings that 'good things come to those who wait' and that 'patience is virtue'. The theme illustrates the relevance of these sayings.

In summary, the essay 'Ukulinda' is about waiting as part of people's lives. It explains that everything revolves around waiting. This is the general topic of the essay, but one of the themes that are taken out of it is that patience produces good results. This theme is specific whereas the topic of the essay is general. This is in line with Diamond's definition of theme and topic earlier. Lastly, this theme can be regarded as a social aspect. Waiting plays a role in people's lives and the community as a whole. It generally develops people and contributes to their advancement. Society becomes a better institution when people learn to practice the art of waiting.

Conclusion

The paper has discussed three themes in Sibiyi's two essays. It started by defining what theme is. The themes discussed are regarded to fall under social aspects because they are factors that are part of people's day-to-day lives in society. The first theme

discussed from the essay 'Amalimi' was discrimination against people with stutters. People with stutters are shown to be victims of discrimination as they are not treated equally in different areas of their lives. This includes being deprived of certain job opportunities and excluded from certain positions in the workplace and in schools. Stereotyping was also extracted from the same essay and discussed as a second theme. Ideas that are regarded to be fixed and unrealistic about people with stutters are identified. The last theme was on patience as an art that produces good results, even though it is difficult to practice for people. Examples were given and discussed from the essay 'Ukulinda'. It is through these examples that the merits of patience were outlined.

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